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ABSTRACT

The Colorado Outward Bound School (COBS) provides successful adjunct programs for special populations undergoing therapy at the Adventure Home (Boulder, CO), the Juvenile Justice Program and the St. Luke's Hospital Alcoholism Recovery Unit (Denver, CO), and the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center Department of Psychiatry (Hanover, NH). The goals of the COBS therapeutic approach include increasing self-esteem, cooperation, compassion, and interdependence; resolving issues of locus of control; increasing a sense of responsibility for self and others; and learning the inherent value of risk taking. The COBS programs include three integral elements: a natural physical environment, a small social environment, and the challenges of coping with both the physical and social environments. The natural setting evokes and reinforces coping rather than defensive behaviors. The environment becomes the therapist because consequences are direct, immediate, and impartial. In small living and learning groups of 9-12, clients learn to communicate, cooperate, depend on, and trust each other in structured group discussions and in facing the common challenges of the outdoors. The challenges include natural living skills as well as frightening, risk-filled activities such as rock climbing, peak ascents, and rappelling. Successfully met challenges lead to self-confidence and a creative use of fear. (SB)

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OUTWARD BOUND AS AN ADJUNCT TO THERAPY

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OUTWARD BOUND AS AN ADJUNCT TO THERAPY

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September, 1981

"I'm a city person, born and raised in New York City. My interest in outdoor environments and wilderness seems to stem from a primordial hunger to get back to roots, to nature, to peace and quiet . . . I have a deep conviction that the source and strength of our lives is in the wilderness, that it is a place of renewal physically and psychically . . . The wilderness, like music, touches something universally felt and experienced by people and perhaps has the power to heal them and bring them together." 1

Sydney Fine
Wilderness Psychology Newsletter

Introduction

In their fifth decade of development, Outward Bound schools worldwide are committed to providing a curriculum of adventure-based, experiential learning to a diverse population. Developed prior to World War II by the German educator, Kurt Hahn, the Outward Bound process has proven to be an effective modality for building self-confidence, stretching emotional and physical limits, developing leadership skills, and promoting personal growth and responsibility. Originally established to teach survival skills to British seamen, Outward Bound has grown and evolved as its philosophy of learning through experience has been demonstrated to be relevant to the needs of many different groups.

The Colorado Outward Bound School, the first of its kind in the United States, has been a significant leader in the experiential education movement, developing numerous programs for special populations. Adult offenders, classroom teachers, corporate personnel, the developmentally disabled--all have participated in outdoor experiences designed for their particular needs. Currently, the school works with St. Luke's Hospital in Denver to provide an Outward Bound experience that is an integral part of therapy for alcoholics and substance abusers in the hospital's Alcoholism Recovery Unit. In each case, Outward Bound serves as an adjunct to existing institutional programs, integrating it's philosophy with that of the sponsoring organization.

The Colorado Outward Bound School recognizes the congruency between the Outward Bound philosophy and the therapeutic process, and is moving to determine the feasibility of developing new programs within the mental health field. This concept paper is designed to present the rationale for the use of Outward Bound as an adjunct to therapy. To begin, a case statement will explain the appropriateness of Outward Bound philosophy to dilemmas facing contemporary

society. The Outward Bound process will be described; its relevance to therapy will be discussed; and model programs, along with indicators and examples of success, will be presented.

Case Statement

Before considering how the Outward Bound process functions as a treatment methodology, it is useful to have some perspective on the nature of contemporary society and of the emotional problems such a society tends to generate. Among the primary presenting symptoms that bring many people into therapy are general dissatisfaction, feelings of alienation, and the absence of significant, meaningful goals. Humanistic and existential therapies have emerged providing new perspectives on the healing process that address these problems. At the core of these therapies is the concept that all human knowledge is based on experience. Human beings are continually involved in the process of growing and learning. Though we may be limited to some extent by heredity and environment, we remain free to choose our own values and to create meaning in our lives. Concomitant with this freedom is the burden of responsibility and commitment to follow through on decisions. To understand the benefits wilderness adventure, performance-based learning provides, it is important to have some sense of existential needs and of the social conditions which have given rise to those needs.

Homo Sapiens evolved over a period of millions of years, achieving essential biological traits more than 100,000 years ago. Our human attributes developed in the process of responding in adaptive ways to the environment in which we evolved.[2] Men and women are social animals. During much of our evolutionary development we depended on small groups. In facing the challenges of an often hostile environment, we were dependent on others like ourselves

for survival. Only recently has the ecological balance between Homo Sapiens and nature been altered. In the 18th century the philosopher Rousseau traced the problem of alienation among humans to our separation from nature, a result of the industrial revolution and the transition to life in large cities. Men and women occasionally have a need to associate with large groups of people, but not on a constant basis. Dubos concluded that "when oversocialized, man is likely to react with frustrations, repressions, or aggressions that may evolve into neuroses."[3]

Though we evolved in a natural world in small, economically viable groups, our dependence on the forces of nature has been to a large extent replaced by a dependence on the forces of technology, industry, politics, and collective ethics. The genius of mankind has achieved for many a standard of living unparalleled in history. With our rational, intellectual, highly scientific orientation to reality, we have overcome the challenges of the outer, physical world. But in the process, we have too often neglected the inner world--our intuitive, affective, aesthetic consciousness. There has been little deepening of personal awareness, thereby disturbing the balance between our inner and outer worlds, a balance which seems to be a prerequisite for good mental health. We are materially rich but psychically poor. As Jacobi states it, "our highly developed civilization and triumphant technology . . . seem to have lost all contact with the soul."[4] We live in a perpetual state of alienation: alienated from self, from society and from the natural environment in which we evolved. Jung referred to this alienation as the general neurosis of our times, a pervading sense of futility meaninglessness, and spiritual emptiness. Similarly, Jaffe described this "appalling state of alienation" as "normality,"[5] a normality which Maslow

saw as really being a "psychopathology of the average, so undramatic and so widely spread that we don't even notice it ordinarily. This general phoniness, this living by illusions and by fear . . . reveals it clearly as sickness, even though widely shared."[6] Contemporary society has lost contact with nature, both internally and externally. We have lost contact with our own selves and therefore with meaning. We run the risk of losing our personality in the mass where we are incapable of self-reliance and without any sense of individual responsibility.

Outward Bound addresses itself well to this problem of alienation because it places men and women in an environment which is not dissimilar to the environment in which their species evolved. Placed in a wilderness environment within the context of a small group, they encounter and cope daily with challenges in order to survive. The evolutionary parallel is obvious. Dubos wrote that "the humanness of life depends above all on the quality of man's relationship to the rest of creation--to the winds and the stars, to the flowers and the beasts, to smiling and weeping humanity."[7] At Outward Bound individuals live and learn in a setting where those relationships can be enhanced, where they can attain a sense of harmony rather than alienation with themselves and with creation.

The Outward Bound Process

In this section the process that is common to all Outward Bound experiences will be described. Three elements are integral to that process: a unique physical environment, a unique social environment, and the challenges encountered in learning to cope with both. The physical environment is a natural environment, a setting devoid of most of the trappings of civilization. The social environment is the small group, "nine to twelve individuals,

living and learning together, acting as a team, needing to develop cooperative efforts and group decision-making abilities in order to succeed."[8] Though different courses have varying clientele, goals, and formats, all Outward Bound programs involve a total living and learning experience. Willing participants are placed together in a positive peer group setting and asked to master a series of problem-solving tasks. These tasks occur in an environment with which the participant is not familiar. Contrast is the key. It allows the participant to "see a generality which tends to be overlooked by human beings in a familiar environment or to gain a new perspective on the old familiar environment"[9] from which he or she comes. Successful completion of these tasks results in increased self-awareness, responsibility, self-esteem, and acceptance of others.

The tasks consist of individual and group challenges--route finding, mountain climbing, cooking over a fire, etc. The tasks are of consequence and require complementary utilization of a person's mental, emotional, and physical resources. The tasks are incremental, organized around the learner's growing capabilities so that she is not overwhelmed by the experience. As the learner encounters and masters each challenge, she discovers her ability to manage herself in a responsible and resourceful way. She feels better about herself and is more inclined to undertake other difficult challenges in her life. She sees herself as an important member of a group. Moreover, she has increased her pool of constructive options from which to choose in future life experiences.[10] These are not insignificant changes. Indeed, in a therapeutic setting, such behavioral changes are usually seen as indicators of a successful outcome in therapy.

Outward Bound as a Therapeutic Approach

The Colorado Outward Bound School is experienced in providing therapeutic programs for special populations in the state of Colorado. An Adventure Home in Boulder for emotionally disturbed and delinquent youth, a Juvenile Justice program in Colorado Springs, an adult offender course for inmates of the reformatory at Buena Vista, as well as the St. Luke's program for recovering alcoholics in Denver--each has been established utilizing the Outward Bound process as the therapeutic medium. Goals for these programs are both institution and client-specific.

In our therapeutic programs, it is our intent that the following behavioral changes and personal growth will occur:

* Self-esteem and self-confidence will increase.
* Locus of control issues will be resolved, as the participant accepts responsibility for dysfunctional behavior and internalizes motivation for creating positive changes.
* The true values of cooperation, interdependence, and compassion will be learned on an experiential basis.
* The sense of responsibility for self, for others in the group, and for society will be enhanced.
* The awareness of dysfunctional as well as functional behavioral patterns will develop in a way that is not possible within four walls.
* The value inherent in taking risks will become clear, even when doing so involves confronting some of the participant's deepest fears.
* The wide range of human reactions will be experienced and expressed appropriately.
* The ability to trust and to be trusted will be heightened.
* Physical health will improve, and the awareness of the importance of maintaining physical fitness will develop.
* New avenues for recreation which are creative, fun, and growth enhancing will be discovered.

These are the goals of the Colorado Outward Bound School's therapeutic approach. Whether the experience is for a 16 year old juvenile delinquent, an emotionally distraught housewife, a 53 year old alcoholic executive, or an inmate at a penal institution, the goals remain the same and the process is similar. The focus of treatment, depending on the needs of the clientele and the goals of the sponsoring institution, may differ.

The natural environment is integral to the Outward Bound process. This environment is therapeutic for a number of reasons. We know that a healthy individual is capable of adapting his behavior to fit the needs of a given situation. Because of our evolutionary endowment, we are prepared to respond in adaptive ways to a natural setting. When placed in such an environment, even though he may initially be uncomfortable, the individual adapts.

The natural environment, then, constitutes a behavior setting which evokes coping rather than defensive behaviors. In coping behaviors the individual responds to threatening or stressful stimuli by dealing with them constructively. In defensive behaviors she responds to the same stimuli with the psychological mechanisms of rationalization, repression, denial, social withdrawal, or flight from reality. Social environments tend to elicit defensive behaviors since the individual must struggle with an overabundance of ambiguous, conflicting, threatening stimuli.[11] In wilderness environments, coping behaviors are more often evoked for the simple reason that such behaviors are conducive to survival in that environment, just as defensive behaviors often are conducive to survival in social environments. In other words, coping behavior in the wilderness is positively reinforced, as are self-sufficiency, risk-taking, initiative, and cooperation.

A natural or wilderness environment is predictable. There is little

that is conflicting or ambiguous. As a result, outcomes of dysfunctional behavior are clear and easily understood. Such an environment is direct, objective, and simple. There are few rules other than those imposed by the environment. There are no walls, little luxury, and much freedom. There is freedom to accept or deny responsibility for one's self and others, to be clean or dirty, to be hungry or well-fed, to be miserable or to have fun. In the true spirit of Rudolf Dreikurs, there is no punishment except that prescribed by nature for failure to plan and anticipate consequences. The consequences of burned oatmeal, of a sleeping bag left out in the rain, or of an improper belay are immediate and direct. One soon learns that responsibility for one's self is a necessity. The teacher is not the therapist but rather the environment and one's peers.

Because of the impartial nature of the environment and the necessity of interacting with it in responsible coping ways to ensure survival, the participant becomes aware of behavioral patterns which are functional, and of those which are not, in a way that is not possible in more traditional therapeutic settings. Through the integration of performance-based and verbal therapies, he learns experientially what works and what does not, for in a natural environment he is provided with a feedback mechanism that is concrete, immediate, and unprejudiced.

Small group dynamics are the second essential ingredient to the Outward Bound process. Many psychologists agree that the self is defined, nurtured, and maintained largely through interaction with other individuals. Growth in self-concept and self-knowledge is contingent upon continued interaction with others. At Outward Bound, participants leave the environment of previous failures and the pressures which may have contributed to those failures.

They become a member of a new social order, the group. Sooner or later, depending on the individual and the complexities of the problem, they become an integral part of the group. Sooner or later, they develop a pride in group membership which is the first step to developing pride in one's self.

In civilization, much of our integration with others is role-bound. That is, we interact with each other in accordance more with the roles we fill than as the unique individuals we are. In the wilderness people are largely free of cultural roles, whether by choice or not. Whether a person is an oil executive or a skid row derelict is irrelevant to the challenge of physical survival. Because of the demands of the environment, people must interact in ways that are centered in the here-and-now. Stripped of their cultural roles, individuals are able to learn new behaviors more easily since they are unencumbered with cultural norms and expectations.

As the small group faces common challenges demanding interdependence, social learning takes place. Whether involved in the essential daily tasks of preparing food, building a shelter, planning a journey, or in such activities as mountain rescue or rock climbing, the members of the group must learn to communicate, cooperate, depend on, and trust each other. Their success depends on this. Communication is essential; yet positive interaction does not always occur easily or naturally. Many of the participants have not developed the skills to make this possible without conflict or hostility. As the members of the group live and learn together, there are growing pains they must endure as they learn the values of cooperation, trust, and compassion. Group discussions focus on the purpose of the various activities and allow feelings and conflicts to be dealt with openly by all members of the group. These meetings may be held daily, perhaps in the

evening, or can be called at any time.

As the participant begins to appreciate her self-worth and feel better about herself, she will have a greater tendency to self-disclose both at group meetings and at other, less structured moments. During her Outward Bound course, she will experience a wide range of human reactions--fear, joy, fatigue, hunger, respect, trust, pain, love. And she will have the opportunity for the appropriate expression of these feelings. Behavior is associated with the affect pertaining to that behavior and with how appropriately those feelings are dealt with. We can begin to change our behavior when we recognize and express the feelings and attitudes underlying it.

The third essential ingredient of the Outward Bound process is the challenges the individual encounters in learning to cope with the wilderness and environment within the social context of a small group. In order to survive, he must learn natural survival skills such as building a fire in the rain, cooking nutritionally balanced meals on a camping stove, keeping warm on a snowy day, self-arresting with an ice axe on a steep snow field. The inherent need to develop these new skills leads to both skill development and a resulting increase in self-esteem.

Many of the activities the participant is involved in are initially frightening and involve risk. Rock climbing, peak ascents, and rappelling may all be perceived as dangerous, though all are undertaken according to strict safety procedures. As she successfully meets the challenge of these high impact activities, the participant will learn to recognize the value inherent in taking risks, even when doing so involves confronting her greatest fears. As she has successful experiences with her body, she will feel a sense of accomplishment, out of which comes greater self-confidence and a more

positive self-concept. Through experience, she will understand that fear is detrimental only when it impedes her from doing what she needs to do. Hopefully, she will learn to use her fear creatively rather than be defeated or paralyzed by it by translating it into "I can't do it" messages.

The day to day living activities present situations to the group that require planning, teamwork, and mutual decision making. The individual shares in the success of the group which is only possible through cooperation and persistence. The various activities provide opportunities to be successful, to help and be helped, to trust and to be trusted, to be responsible for one's self and for others--all of which have too often become rare opportunities for the alienated, delinquent, and disturbed.

The physical experiences at Outward Bound are not an end, but a means to an end, as they promote individual growth and encourage new levels of cooperation and human relationships. "They provide the opportunity for self-testing and self-assessment under enough stress to produce growth in situations which focus on both the individual and on strong elements of group cooperation."[12]

Outcomes

Before describing model programs that utilize the Outward Bound process as an adjunct to therapy, it would be valuable to introduce two individuals who participated in such programs, Tom and Tony.

Tom has been accepted at the Adventure Home, a residential treatment facility for delinquent and disturbed youth, as an alternative to placement at Fort Logan, a state psychiatric hospital. He had been rejected by three other licensed childcare facilities because of his chronic history of setting fires. He also had severe problems with theft, drugs, his family, and aggression toward younger children and animals. He had been expelled from an

alternative school for emotionally disturbed youth because of truancies and constant disruptive behavior in the classroom. Often he seemed lost in a fantasy world of thrills and derring-do. His self-concept was extremely poor. He bristled with defiance and defense, so much so that his initial posture in group therapy meetings was to hide behind a pillow. Tom's progression through the program was stormy, but he did change, as evidenced by this letter written by his social worker a year after referring him to the program:

> A change began in Tom after his first wilderness experience. He was then able, after three months, to actually express pride in his accomplishments, to make some positive affection statements about adults, and to relax his tough, macho demeanor. Today he has a fulltime job and wants to return to school so he can "make more bucks." He has not set a fire (except a campfire) for nine months. He can accept criticism and has not had further law violations. Tom, most importantly, is no longer an angry young man.

Tony was an alcoholic. Thirty-eight years old, he worked as a coal miner near Redstone, Colorado. A chain smoker, he was overweight and in poor health. Because of his drinking, his marriage had disintegrated, and he was on the verge of losing his job several times. As part of his treatment at St. Luke's Hospital's Alcoholism Recovery Unit, Tony participated in a four-day Outward Bound experience during which he had to undertake a number of stressful activities such as rock climbing and rappelling. After completion of the course, Tony wrote the following:

> The rock climb . . . I've never been in a situation where I had to depend on and trust in myself to conquer it and it made me feel better about myself than I have in years. Also, it made me see what a waste I was letting myself go to. I know I can do better than I have been. I'm tired of being a people pleaser--just doing nice things for others instead of taking care of myself . . . I've learned over these past days how to trust myself and to trust others, and how other people have to be able to trust me. I'm not saying my problem is solved. It's

> just in the beginning stages. I've still got a lot of anger, guilt, and sadness within me that is going to have to come out in the open where I can look at it and find ways and means of dealing with it. And I'm thinking I'm in the right place and time to start, and I'm willing. When I left on Outward Bound I had no feeling of knowing I would come back this way. Something happened to me out there and I'm not sure what it was. But I'm thankful and hope I can work it out.

Model Programs and Indicators of Success

This concluding section will highlight four model programs that have utilized Outward Bound as an adjunct to therapy. These programs are the Adventure Home in Boulder, the Juvenile Justice Program in Colorado Springs, the Alcoholism Recovery Unit at St. Luke's Hospital in Denver, and the Department of Psychiatry at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in Hanover, New Hampshire. These programs serve a varied clientele--emotionally disturbed youth, multiple offenders, alcoholics, drug addicts, and psychiatric patients.

The Adventure Home: This program was established as a residential treatment facility for troubled youth. Located in a suburban neighborhood, the Adventure Home was experimental. It was an attempt to integrate Outward Bound methods into a group home setting in order to work with youth on the verge of being institutionalized. The program utilized a four-step format, with each phase placing increasing amounts of autonomy, responsibility, and leadership upon each youth as he demonstrated his ability to handle it. Six components were included in the on-going treatment process at the home: living tasks, education, employment, outdoor skills, physical fitness, and therapy. During his stay at the Adventure Home, which averaged nine months, each student participated in a 23-day Outward Bound course. An evaluation of the program, done by Harmon Associates of San Francisco, noted that

"the program is an innovative experiment . . . that seems to have made a sharp difference in the lives"[13] of many of its clientele.

The Juvenile Justice Program: This is another project established by the Colorado Outward Bound School for delinquent youth. The Juvenile Justice Program provides extended community-based treatment for multiple offenders. Every two months eight high-risk youth participate in a strenuous, 14-day Outward Bound experience. This course is preceded by a day of orientation during which the participants talk about their apprehensions and expectations for the course. They also set personal goals pertaining to their individual problems to be worked on during and subsequent to the Outward Bound experience. Staff members maintain contact with each youth and her family for six months after the completion of the 14-day course. A second year evaluation study indicated that, among those youth who had successfully completed the program (75%), there was just a 3% recidivism rate. In addition, the evaluators found a significant improvement in family situation in 50% of the cases. In a review funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of over 200 programs for troubled youth, the National School Resource Network tabbed the Juvenile Justice Program as one of twenty exemplary programs in the country.

St. Luke's Hospital: The Outward Bound component of the Alcoholism Recovery Unit's treatment program at the hospital provides patients an opportunity to apply what they have learned in a more concrete way than is possible in the protective environment of the hospital. In their third or fourth week of a 30-day treatment program, patients travel to the Colorado Outward Bound School's basecamp in the mountains near Leadville. For three days they undertake a series of problem-solving tasks, initiative games, and high

impact, low risk challenges designed to mirror ineffective behavioral patterns and to provide new, more creative options for dealing with life's stresses. Preliminary research indicates that "76% of the Outward Bound patient participants have maintained complete sobriety as compared to 67% of the non-Outward Bound patients in the same rehabilitation program."[14]

Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center: The Department of Psychiatry, in conjunction with the Hurricane Island Outward Bound School, offers programs to psychiatric patients at three mental health facilities in New England: its own Dartmouth-Hitchcock Mental Health Center; the Veteran's Administration Hospital in White River Junction, Vermont; and the West Central Mental Health Services in Grafton and Sullivan Counties in New Hampshire. Occasional overnight camping trips, as well as one day sessions that include rock climbing, rappelling, a ropes course, group problem-solving tasks, and canoeing are examples of the Outward Bound activities utilized. Goals for each session are negotiated with the patients, and may vary from the concrete to the abstract, depending on the needs of the client and the intensity and chronicity of symptoms. The success of these programs has led to the establishment of 14 similar programs nationwide. A study done at the Veteran's Administration Hospital indicated an improvement in self-esteem in Outward Bound patients and a reduced length of hospital stay when compared to a control group.[15]

Conclusion

The programs highlighted here use Outward Bound methods and activities as adjuncts to ongoing therapeutic intervention. In all cases, Outward Bound's reality-oriented philosophy of learning through experience is congruent with and reinforces the operational philosophy of the sponsoring institution.

Outward Bound experiences have been proven successful in increasing self-esteem, facilitating cognitive and social adjustment, enhancing internal control and responsibility, building trust, developing communication skills, and improving physical health. The Outward Bound experience solidifies the goals of the sponsoring institution and provides a reality check for what has been learned and accomplished during treatment. Outward Bound can provide a significant experience for the participant and serves as a capping stone to the therapeutic process. As stated by Joseph Nold, one of the founders of the Outward Bound movement in the United States, Outward Bound programs address themselves to "What is drab, oppressive, and alienating in our society and institutions. They can spark enthusiasm, inspire vision and bring to the level of consciousness the deep and underlying questions of life and meaning."[16]

FOOTNOTES

1 Sydney Fine, "Wilderness Psychology Newsletter", Feb., 1979, pp. 11-12

2 Rene Dubos, So Human an Animal, p. 145

3 Ibid., p. 154

4 Jolande Jacobi, The Psychology of C. G. Jung, p. 133

5 Aniela Jaffe, The Myth of Meaning, p. 60

6 Abraham Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, p. 16

7 Dubos, Op. Cit., p. 8

8 Joseph J. Nold, "Wilderness Training as an Alternative to Incarceration", Colorado Outward Bound School, p. 1

9 Victor Walsh and Gerald Golins, "The Exploration of the Outward Bound Process", Colorado Outward Bound School, p. 4

10 Ibid., p. 16

11 Arthur Bernstein, "Wilderness as a Therapeutic Behavior Setting", Therapeutic Recreation Journal; Fourth Quarter, 1972, p. 160

12 Harold Howe III, "The Role of Experience in Education", National Conference on Experiential Education, Estes Park, Colorado, 1974, p. 2

13 David King and Paul Harmon, "Final Report: Evaluation of the Colorado Outward Bound School's Adventure Home Project in Boulder, Colorado", 1979, p. 29

14 Marlene Hammond, "You Alone Can Do It, But You Can't Do It Alone", Outward Bound News, Summer, 1981, p. 3

15 Thomas F. Stich and Robert S. MacArthur, "The Outward Bound Mental Health Project", submitted to the van Amerigen Foundation, 1981, p. 9

16 Joseph J. Nold, "Outward Bound Approaches to Alternative Schooling", Colorado Outward Bound School, p. 1